

Architecture of Some Churches in the Illinois Valley

Megan Eiten

St. Bede Academy, Peru

Teacher: Michael Pomatto

There are many churches in the Illinois Valley. The church that a person goes to depends on their faith and often on their ethnic background. In the mid-1800s, it was important to have a lot of churches because people of different faiths and backgrounds did not agree on many issues.

Many of the churches around this area were built to look like those from the native land of the group of people who came from there. People from different areas wanted to be able to practice their religion, their way.

One church of interest in the valley is the Zion German Evangelical Lutheran Church of Peru, which is now known as Zion United Church of Christ. It was founded for the German people of the Lutheran faith living in the area on September 5, 1852. In 1866, a church building was built, which is still standing. This church is a plain architectural building outside with a steeple, three bells, and stained glass windows. It is of the Blackpool architectural style. Inside are wooden carvings. The wood that was used to form these carvings on the inside of the church, and other things on the building's outside, and inside, such as pews, was imported specially from Germany. The people of this community were so proud of their church that they had the wood imported from their home country. Between 1866 and 2003, there have been many repairs to this church, but the basic structure is the same and members of this church are very proud of it.

Another of the churches of note in the valley is St. Hyacinth's Church in LaSalle. It was the Polish Catholic church of the area and it was found in 1875. Polish families of the area had formerly gone to St. Joseph's Church in Peru where the mass was held in German, but the Polish families requested to have their own church so they could have mass said in their native tongue. This church burned down in 1890. A new church was built in 1891 and is the one that is

presently standing. It is a red brick building of the Gothic architectural style with two steeples. The church has three bells named for St. Hyacinth, St. Stanislaus, and St. Albert.

Another church is St. Patrick's Church in LaSalle. It was created in 1838, but the current church building was built in 1851. This church was created for the Irish people in the area. The original church was made of wood, but the current one is made of limestone. It is quite plain on the outside with a steeple and a bell, but on the inside is an elaborate carved choir loft. This church is especially spectacular, because rather than having an architect or a professional build the church, it was built by the people who were going to use it, the parishioners.

Another church was St. Joseph's Parish in Peru. This was the German Catholic church in Peru. It was also the parish of the Polish Catholics until their own church was built in 1875. It is of the Churchtown architectural style and has many stained glass windows.

Another church is Resurrection Church in LaSalle, which was formerly known as St. Joseph's Church. It was the German Catholic Church in LaSalle. It is of the Lancaster type of architectural style. It appears to be somewhat rounded from the outside, with a tall steeple, and is very large on the inside.

Many of these churches have been repaired over the years, but some have changed, but they all still have the same basic structure with which they began. They show how immigrants liked to be reminded of their homes. Hopefully these churches will continue to remind descendants of immigrants of the area from which the ancestors came. Each church is different and special in its own way, but they are all unique to the Illinois Valley in their own way. [From Elizabeth Cummins, *The Stone Church*; "Zion United Church of Christ," <http://www.zionuccperu.org> (Oct. 24, 2003); "St. John's Lutheran Church," <http://www.stjohntoluca.info/> (Oct. 24, 2003); Ottawa Visitor's Center, "Church Directory for

Ottawa, Illinois,” <http://www.visit-otta-il.com/churches.htm> (Oct. 24, 2003); Carol Ryan-Spenador, “LaSalle County Illinois Churches,” <http://www.rootsweb.com/~illasall/churches.html> (Oct. 24, 2003); “History,” n.d., <http://www.theramp.net/lasalle/history.htm> (Oct. 28, 2003); Tony Boughen, “Lancashire Churches,” <http://www.lancashirechurches.co.uk/churches.htm> (Nov. 8, 2003); The Catholic Post, “Top Stories, Week of June 1,” http://www.cdop.org/catholic_post/post_6_1_03/news.cfm (Nov. 8, 2003); The Catholic Post, “Top Stories, Week of October 29, 2000,” http://www.cdop.org/catholic_post/post_10_29_00/news.cfm (Nov. 23, 2003).]